

**Published as part of Traveller's Tales
Grapevine - Volume 36, Issue 1
Perth International Dance
December 2024**

In this "Traveller's Tale" we hear from Pam Gunn who visited Ethiopia and Madagascar in August 2024, For part of her trip she was joined by Louise and Laurie who also spent lots of time in Nepal. Here are a few of their stunning photos:

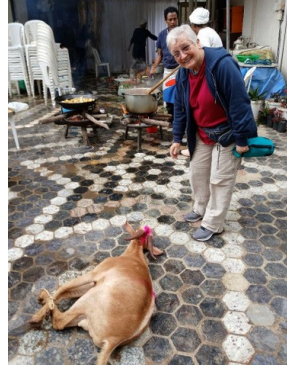


Dancing in Ethiopia and Madagascar

by Pam Gunn

During my August travels to the other side of the Indian Ocean I was privileged to watch and join in dancing on five occasions.

My Ethiopian friends were holding a big party to celebrate the baptism of their first Grandson, Leul, and Louise and Laurie Scott and I arrived in time to help with the preparations. This included decorating the baby's room with Aussie gifts, buying new outfits at the traditional clothing market and purchasing an unfortunate goat destined to be part of the feast. As the party itself progressed music and dancing took over from eating and we enthusiastically joined in, trying to copy the shoulder-shaking moves of one particular relative. It went on for hours and I had to retreat for a rest in the middle! I was lured back by the sound of a new live instrument – two wandering minstrels had heard the recorded music from outside the compound walls and come in to join the throng, apparently making up songs to fit the occasion.



After a day's recovery and plenty of Ethiopian coffee, we were off to Madagascar. We had been drawn there mainly by hopes of seeing the lemurs and other wildlife. This was certainly accomplished, but is a tale for another time. Louise had mentioned to our wonderful guide, Danhy, that we were folk dancers, so one day he arranged for us to have a lunch stop in a town called Ambositra, where we could partake of traditional Malagasy food and also be entertained by a folklore ensemble, Groupe Fanjan' Oliva. A troop of 10 colourful scarf-twirling dancers were accompanied by 4 musicians playing drums and accordion. Louise and I, swaying on the sidelines, were soon invited to join in. This was much to the amazement of Danhy who said his tourists had never done that before. I pointed out that he had never had Perth International Dancers as clients before!



Along the (very bumpy) road we came across a lively procession of people swaying and leaping about to a brass band. We were somewhat surprised when we noticed a coffin being carried and to learn it was a funeral procession. This rather joyous event takes place one year after the person has died with their bones being transported to their final resting place in the family tomb. What a way to go!



Back in the capital Antananarivo (Tana for short) I was treated to another Folkloric display. This time it was at the restaurant alongside the historic King's Palace. Again, very colourful and cheerful Merina dancers with a band and a surprise dance revealing a 'turkey' from behind their shawls.



Then, as a final farewell, I was privileged to meet ten young dancers from the Youth Club run by Danhy and his wife. They performed two line-dances with a mixture of contemporary and traditional steps. Then I taught them a circle dance to the Vine and Fig Tree song that my Working Voices Choir sometimes sings at Peace events. It seemed to go down well.



All in all, so much to see and wonderful people to meet in Madagascar. If you would like to visit, I can put you in touch with our wonderful guide Danhy.

Pam Gunn – visited Ethiopia and Madagascar in August 2024